



In Iowa's Interest:

Harvest Season Reminds Us to Give Farm Safety the Time and Attention it Deserves

by Senator Tom Harkin

Fall harvest season is the culmination of many months of hard work, investment, and careful planning and management -- it's sort of a final accounting for the efforts of an entire year. Harvest is also the time when the tremendous contributions of American agriculture to our economy and society are most obvious in the food, feed, fuel, fiber and biomaterials we depend upon every day.

With so much at stake, farm families and farm workers across Iowa and our nation apply to the harvest a well-known work ethic and dedication. They work rapidly in order to beat fickle weather and the calendar. In the process, critical safety precautions can be laid aside or overlooked. It can be easy for hurried farmers and farm workers to think an accident or injury won't happen to them or their families. Yet, with a moment's thought, no one would judge the harvest or any farm task as really being worth a sacrifice of life, limb or health.

Safety on the farm is almost entirely a matter of devoting the necessary time, attention and awareness to the hazards and dangers. That's why this is a good time of the year for promoting farm safety, focusing attention on the topic and building greater awareness and knowledge. Those were the purposes of the first farm safety week proclamation issued by President Franklin Roosevelt for September 1944 and of the National Farm Safety and Health Week proclamation that President Barack Obama just recently issued for 2010.

Farm safety advocates are focused this year on promoting safer use of all-terrain vehicles, usually called ATVs, using the slogan "Work Smart, Ride Safe." While ATVs are a common feature on Iowa farms, their dangers -- especially to children -- are too often overlooked. In 2008, over 400 Americans died and another 135,000 were injured in ATV accidents. More than a third of ATV injuries are among children, as are 28 percent of ATV deaths. ATV injuries send some 40,000 children to hospital emergency departments in the United States each year.

ATVs are heavier than they appear (some exceeding 800 pounds) and can easily roll over and land on their riders. They are not designed to carry passengers or to be operated on paved roads, where they are hard to control. Safety experts recommend that children under 16 not operate ATVs at all or at least not operate adult-size ATVs. Other common-sense precautions are to read and follow owner manuals carefully, to get proper training, to wear an approved helmet, goggles and other protective attire, and to attach to the ATV seat an orange warning flag, such as those promoted by Iowa's Center for Agricultural Safety and Health.

Farm safety is a year-round concern, not only during the harvest season, and is as equally important in livestock, dairy and poultry operations as in crop production. A few of the most critical safety concerns include:

- Avoiding electrocution and electrical burn hazards through adequate height and clearance distances for electric power lines, extra caution in moving or operating equipment around power lines, and checking and repairing frayed or worn electrical wiring, insulation and equipment. Obtain the services of utility company personnel or trained electricians.
- Using extra caution in and around grain bins, storage and wagons, such as staying away from flowing grain, inspecting for and avoiding crusted grain, using lifelines and having a backup person present, de-energizing and locking out equipment, and ensuring ventilation, adequate oxygen and respiratory protection.
- For working with animals, have adequate equipment, fences and gates, kept in good repair, and have another person with you for help. Avoid manure pit dangers from gasses, explosions and entrapment.
- For motorists and equipment operators on roads, pay extra attention to speeds, vision and visibility, implement widths, warning lights and slow-moving vehicle signs.

In the space of this column only a portion of the critical information can be covered. Please look for further information and assistance through the following organizations, whose work I am proud to support as a senior member of the U.S. Senate Agriculture and Appropriations Committees.

National Center for Agricultural Safety (NECAS) in Peosta, Iowa: www.necasag.org/

Iowa's Center for Agricultural Safety and Health at the University of Iowa: <http://www.public-health.uiowa.edu/icash/>

Farm Safety 4 Just Kids, located in Urbandale, Iowa: www.fs4jk.org

Iowa State University Extension: www.extension.iastate.edu/farmmanagement/safety/